DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 191 524 JC 800 486

AUTHOR Seitz, James E.
TITLE Evaluating Your President Objectively: A Message to Trustees.
PUB DATE 79
NOTE 17p.: Paper presented at the National Meeting of the Association of Community College Trustees (Detroit, MI, 1979)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Evaluation: *Board Administrator Relationship: *College Presidents: *Evaluation Criteria: Evaluation Methods: *Governing Boards: Job Performance: Occupational Information: Teacher Administrator Relationship: Trustees: Two Year Colleges

ABSTRACT

Board members, most of whom have never been in a position to employ, evaluate, and terminate a chief executive officer, must strive toward objectivity as they evaluate their college presidents. Central to this objectivity is: (1) an attempt on the part of the board member to place him/herself as much as possible in the place of the person being evaluated: (2) the elimination of subjective rating methods in the evaluation process: (3) a realization that the interpersonal skills of the president, i.e., the ability of the president to get along with faculty and staff, do not adequately measure institutional progress: and (4) an understanding of the shortcomings in evaluations made by students, faculty, and other groups that are rarely cognizant of the total environment in which the college president must operate. To maximize objectivity in the evaluation process, college presidents should insist upon a formal evaluation procedure based on expectations incorporated in the president's job description. Such expectations should be measurable in terms of specific outcomes, and should be mutually agreed upon by the president and the board. A scoring mechanism should be employed when comparing actual performance with desired results. While objective evaluation methods may take more time to implement than short, subjective reviews, the accountability they foster will strengthen the board/president relationship. (JP)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED191524

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
James Seitz
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

EVALUATING YOUR PRESIDENT OBJECTIVELY: A MESSAGE TO TRUSTEES

James E. Seitz, President
Edison State Community College
Piqua, Ohio

You have been recognized as a person with qualities appropriate for board service in an important institution. You are to be complimented. Your appointment or election to that prestigious office is an honor.

But boardsmanship is not honorary. Much serious business and difficult work must take place, including the evaluation of your president.

For the first time in your life, you may be in a position to employ, evaluate, and terminate someone. If it's not your first time for that, probably never before had you held the fate of a chief executive at your discretion. Certainly, you are a rare individual if you have had any prior experience in the evaluation of a president of a college, which, if you don't realize it, presents conditions substantially different from those occurring in business, industrial, and secondary school settings.

Perhaps you feel totally unprepared in this important matter of presidential evaluation. Look about. You may take false comfort in the probability that your colleagues on the board are no better prepared.

How, then, do you proceed? I suggest the first rule of

JC 800 486

order is never to subject anyone, including your president, to any form of evaluation to which you yourself would not want to submit in similar circumstances. The rule sounds biblical, I'm sure. Be that as it may, I believe it is an extremely important ethic to observe.

Assume You're the President

Try to put yourself in the position of your president. Suppose you are the exec to be evaluated. What process would you prefer? Does it shake your confidence somewhat that you now report at one time to more bosses, the trustees, than you reported to individually throughout all your working years?

Let us assume for this scenario that your board is comprised of seven trustees, and they have these qualifications and characteristics: Two trustees are teachers in local schools. One school represented is unionized--a condition which you are known to reject in principle for educators. One trustee is a former office worker, one practices law, one is a business leader, another a farmer, and the seventh member a medical doctor.

As to other descriptions, one of the trustees is a disgruntled, would-be politician who has been defeated for every office sought but this one. Only two of your board members had ever before served on a public board of any kind. The two trustees newest to the board have served only three months each. One of the more experienced members seldom attends board meetings, and he often opposes your recommendations when he does attend. Two members had previously applied for employment at your college, which you denied to them because of their inferior

backgrounds. Another member, now chairman of the board, at one time publicly opposed the passing of a needed tax levy for your community college. To make matters even more interesting, the board is predominately of one political party, and the original board which hired you was of the opposite political persuasion, almost to the man. And, yes, you strongly suspect that the lone member continuing from the original board had opposed your appointment at the outset.

Nevertheless, you are confident about the excellent progress achieved by the college under your leadership. The record, you believe, will substantiate that. But your success has been marred somewhat. The general studies faculty recently lodged a bitter complaint against you in the public press for, as they put it, "ignoring" their input on a policy recommendation. The allegation evidently impressed some board members, for one conducted a "truth-finding" investigation. Actually, he visited in offices on campus behind closed doors, excluding yours. Since that time, you have had much difficulty trying to maintain the level of board support you previously enjoyed when presenting proposals.

(At this point, I offer a disclaimer: Any similarity of this contrived illustration to your situation or to mine, past or present, is purely coincidental and probably due to the broad commonality of occurrence of the incidents and conditions portrayed.)

The stage is set. Your contract is up for renewal or reconsideration, and an evaluation is to be conducted for that purpose. What form of evaluation would you want in the situation

described? Your future, your family's future, and to an extent the future of the college may very well depend on it.

Avoid Subjectivity

In the situation given, or in any other for that matter, it is imperative for the president to receive an objective evaluation. The use of any rating method which largely depends on subjective judgments may be most unfair. Such methods are inherently open, not only to the desired sound judgments of people, but also to their uninformed opinions, questionable motives, aberrant whims, prejudices, and hearsay.

Trustees, of course, have a conscionable duty to be fair, but unfailing fairness cannot be considered one of man's universal qualities. While most people intend to be fair, the subjective approach typically places them in a position of responding to conditions for which they do not have all the facts for making judgments fairly.

Subjective rating methods of evaluation remain quite popular. Much of the popularity seems to stem from the ease with which rating scales can be administered and scored, as well as the limited effort needed by the rater in recording his/her perceptions. Therein lies an important weakness. The reliability of the rater's perceptions becomes as much a valid concern as the score received by the person evaluated. The propensity of an observer to perceive a subject differently at times, and according to circumstances which are unrelated to and independent of the subject perceived, is a phenomenon well documented. One's own background of experiences can make a considerable difference in the recording of perceptions, to say nothing of the relevance

or ambiguity of the statements sometimes included in rating instruments.

A variety of different methods and techniques of evaluation are in use today. The personal traits rating procedures already alluded to, social characteristics check lists, descriptive essay forms, critical incidents records, and structured group or individual interview techniques are some of the common ones. They are mostly representative of evaluation at its subjective best. The team evaluation method has much merit, but the difficulty is to engage a completely impartial team of experts who can apply it knowledgeably to a presidential evaluation, at least at moderate cost.

In addition to the problems previously cited, a major concern with the procedures commonly used is that many are narrowly based on human relations criteria with provisions for evaluation by subordinates. The acceptance of the social or human relations approach is partly the result of some educational theorists having advanced their ideas about the evaluation process without having been in a position of managerial responsibility to know what emphasis is important. Getting along with everyone and being liked have gained more importance in some quarters than attaining institutional progress and organizational quality--the primary matters for which the chief executive is responsible.

A Compelling Syllogism

Some theorists espouse a compelling syllogism. It goes this way: Administration is a social function; college presidents are administrators; therefore, college presidents must be appraised in terms of their social interaction.

The shortcoming of that reasoning has been sadly demonstrated by a college president who did all possible to compensate faculty at the highest level, because, he rationalized, "a well-paid faculty is a happy faculty." The strong support of faculty and staff was evidence of the way this president implemented (and overextended) his philosophy. His trustees also thought they had a gem of a leader, considering the obviously good rapport he had established. All went along beautifully for several years, and he consistently received high marks from his subordinates on leadership ability, that is, until one year when the accumulated effect of his folly left the college's budget hundreds of thousands of dollars in the red, with nothing in reserve to pay the bill. Undoubtedly, this president's popularity quickly declined. Not only he but many other employees lost their jobs. The irony of the situation was that this president's unnoticed and unattended poor management skills perpetrated one of the dirtiest human relations tricks of all--the unnecessary loss of jobs and employment.

Several points may be drawn from this true case: (1) There is much more to administration than just concern about social interaction, (2) subordinate evaluations may not truly reflect the chief executive's administrative and managerial abilities, or worth, (3) a board would be advised to tie presidential evaluation to presidential responsibilities, rather than to a system which harbors elements of a popularity contest, and (4) the evaluation should serve not only to identify executive strengths and weaknesses but also as a basis for correcting troublesome areas.

The Subordinate Perception Syndrome

Many of the executive's responsible actions and important activities simply are not visible within the college community. Those entrapped in the subordinate perception syndrome would do well to recognize that fact.

Faculty and staff are ordinarily too far removed from the inter-workings of the president's office to have more than an iota of a notion as to how effective the leadership is with the legislature, the many governmental bureaucracies, and the board of trustees. Neither can they know the alternative choices available and the lengthy behind-the-scenes foundation work on which progressive leadership, long-range planning, and future developments depend. They can only offer perceptions, and probably very poor ones at that.

Besides, it seems to be the Great American Pastime to concentrate on telling the other fellow, after the fact, where he was wrong. Public officials everywhere can attest to that.

If trustees insist on having their president rated by his subordinates (anonymously, of course), then they should be willing to be evaluated the same way. Very likely, if the practice of employee evaluation of boards became wide-spread, there would be many more resignations among trustees than now occur. That result may be good in some instances, but in the long run I think it would be detrimental to leadership effectiveness. Some trustees already react too sensitively to the attitudes of faculty and staff toward them. Trustees should not be emotionally influenced in their judgments.

The executive officer must also be free from coercive or

subtle pressures to please. His personal traits may be perceived to be above reproach, and the process of working with subordinates may be viewed as eminently performed, yet both may occur in a way dysfuntional to the organization.

The classic example is the executive who, for the sake of harmony and popular support, fails to hold subordinates strictly accountable. Perhaps he does not even require written job descriptions, but most assuredly he never dismisses anyone, no matter how incompetent some may be. He will virtually sacrifice the vitality and quality of the institution in order to avoid the controversy sometimes attendant to waking up a lethargic crew. What this portrays is a pathetic situation, the likes of which have been allowed to continue all too often in education. The use of evaluations by subordinates can serve to perpetuate such conditions.

The consumer theory of evaluation, like the subordinate theory, has been proposed as a means of performance evaluation. It, too, has severe limitations. Imagine how students would rate their administrators who had recommended dismissal for conduct of a very popular student leader or the banishment of the widely-supported student paper for promulgating lewdness and obscenities. The perceptions would probably be no more favorable or valid at that time than would the rating of a president by faculty where the adversarial atmosphere of collective bargaining is fomenting. None but the most naive persons would expect a consistently unbiased, reliable evaluation from such sources. Neither will informed boards solicit or accept appraisals from such sources, even when foisted upon them.

Insist on Objectivity

Trustees, also, must avoid the vagaries of evaluation by perception on their part. Results, not feelings, not perceptions of human interaction, social traits, or leadership style, are the basis for measuring instiutional progress and executive effectiveness. The responsibility shared with the board relative to attaining the institution's mission and goals becomes the proper area for executive appraisal.

A college president, as with other employees, should be given an evaluation based systematically and objectively on performance and results achieved according to predefined duties. If necessary, he should insist on an objective performance evaluation. The president who would be denied the privilege might do one of two things: (1) resign or (2) ask the trustees to resign, while recognizing that invoking the second option would be tantamount to doing the first.

The evaluation of a college president is serious business, of course, but boards evidently too often have evaluated no more carefully than does the man in the street. Some have been satisfied to give off-the-cuff, gut-level, or hunch assessments. Others have been known to undertake no real evaluation at all until some crisis occurred on campus, at which time the president was called on the carpet. Investigation and clandestine evaluation have sometimes / been substituted for systematic evaluation and firm support at the first sign of a power play against the president. The reported occurrences of that nature are unfortunately extensive, and their handling extensively unfortunate.

The college president who today fails to insist that a formal, objective evaluation procedure be implemented is flirting with catastrophe. The general absence of a carefully designed,

reliable system of review which sets out board expectations and provides for executive improvement in needed areas, probably more than anything else, has been the underlying cause of the high rate of turnover among chief executive officers in colleges. Apparently few boards have been educated to the need and to the procedure for evaluating more effectively.

Executive Needs

The chief executive needs a comprehensive evaluation plan to work by if he is to be free from constraints of the uncertain, have peace of mind necessary for best productivity and leadership, appreciate all the board considers to be important, be given credit for strengths as well as shortcomings, and know in what areas to direct conscientious effort for achieving progress and self-improvement. The plan should be endorsed by the full board. It is one of the executive's greatest needs.

For the sake of institutional progress, a president needs a board which has confidence in him and a board in which he has confidence. He cannot work effectively otherwise.

One of the best means of developing a sound board-president relationship is a written document specifying the details of everything to be considered by the board in assessing the president's performance. Properly done, both parties build confidence and respect in each other. The document becomes, in effect, a contract of understanding which each party has an obligation to follow. The president knows exactly what is expected of him, as there is no leeway for surprises, and the board can see results measured against specific expectations and standards. Moreover, the written document provides for continuity of expectations,

which is particularly important for the president at times of turnover and replacement in the board's membership.

The community college president also needs trustees who understand the unique leadership role he must fill and who will evaluate in that light. Countervailing pressures represented by faculty, staff, students, community groups--and, yes, trustees--continually impinge upon and affect the executive's performance and decisions. Thus a president must be a risk-taker who has courage to act alone, if need be. (As the caption read to a picture which James B. Conant, former president of Harvard, kept in his office: "Behold the turtle! He makes progress only with his neck out.") Trustees must understand the nature, the subtleties, of the executive's position so that when he acts alone they will allow for an occasional mistake and provide the continual backing needed.

A mutually designed, discussed, and reviewed objective job performance evaluation instrument can do much to foster the necessary understanding of the president's role and responsibilities. It will protect against taking spurious action for a single error, but it will also indicate when gross or repeated mismanagement occurs.

Objective Appraisal

What constitutes an objective appraisal? The president of Seagull Enterprises, writing in Supervisory Management, states the first requisite: "The criteria must be based on reliable, valid, observable, measurable elements in the job itself, not on subjective judgments or personal biases on the part of the person doing the appraising."[1] The job description is the foundation. It must exist in terms defining the job's specific

responsibilities and levels of authority as agreed to by president and board. Around it are built standards of performance.

Second, the criteria of the appraisal and the standards of performance, more properly called standards of expectation, should be established by board and president mutually. These criteria and standards should be drawn-up before the period of work begins on which the evaluation will be based. Both parties then know what is expected from the outset.

Third, it is important to express the criteria and standards in measurable terms as related to results and expected outcomes. The appraisal document should take into account the quantity and quality of the work, the amount of time needed for completions, and give some indication of how the achievement of objectives will lead to improvement over existing conditions.

The one element of the system which needs to be stressed is the mutual relationship involved. Both the document and the actual appraisal review should be the cooperative work of board, or board committee, and the chief executive. That practice will do much to develop mutual trust and understanding, the expertise of both will be utilized, and the opportunities for obtaining performance improvement, while reducing stress, are increased.

The process could begin with the president. Noting each line-item in his position description, he can develop a set of objectives and standards for the evaluation period ahead. (Annual evaluation periods may be used, but a board may prefer to relate the length of period to the contract renewal date, especially if the president is given a multi-year contract.) Some items in the description will have a single objective. Others will have many.

The final number will depend on just what he and the board agree to as areas needing emphasis.

By relating the evaluation to the position description, the president will be judged to some extent on institutional results not totally dependent upon his actions alone. That is to be expected. Presidents should be charged with leadership for the progress and viability of the college. Maintaining a balanced budget, increasing enrollment by five per cent, or reducing student attrition by ten per cent are examples of possible institutional goals on which the president's performance might be partly judged.

On occasion, a trustee will want to include a topic for evaluation in the document which is not stated as a duty in the president's position description. It is then necessary to decide if the topic is an appropriate one for evaluating the president. If it is, some statement of responsibility should be added to the description of duties. Bear in mind: A president needs a complete job description so he will know what he is expected to do, and he needs a complete evaluation document so he will know how well he is expected to do it.

The Instrument

One workable approach to objective evaluation is to set up a document in four columns, as follows:

Column I: Responsibilities

These are statements based precisely on each line-item in the job description.

Column II: Activities

Statements are listed of one or more specific things to be done in relation to each responsibility listed in Column I.

Column III: Desired Performance

For each activity listed in Column II, one or more statements which indicate the level of performance to be achieved for satisfactory performance are given. Each of these statements, insofar as practicable, should be given in measurable, results-oriented, quantifiable terms. Product statements, as opposed to process statements, are to be preferred.

Column IV: Actual Performance

This column is completed at the time of evaluation. The president will usually have to document the performance achieved and share the facts with the board.

As an example of how the instrument is developed, consider the item in a president's job description which assigns responsibility for providing administrative leadership. One of the activities for that responsibility, which would be listed in Column II, might be to develop the deans' management skills. A performance standard (Column III) for that activity might read: "The deans will participate annually in four work sessions on Management for Results as conducted by the president." A more results-oriented companion performance standard might read: "By the end of the year, each dean will have completed an acceptable, detailed plan for implementing a management improvement program for the mid-management employees supervised." Note in this example the objectivity, the measurability, and the chances for management improvement by defining a specific leadership activity for the president.

Compare that with this statement: "Inspires subordinates to independent creative work," which is one of three "subordinate

perception" statements on administrative leadership included in a popular rating instrument.[2] Are we to believe every subordinate is capable of independent creative work, can be inspired to it, or will give credit for the inspiration when provided whether or not any independent creative work occurs? I leave that statement and its inherent nonsense for your analysis. You can undoubtedly detect other problems with it.

When comparing actual performance with that desired on the objective instrument, the board may want to apply some means of scoring each item. A scale of "1" to "5" might be used for that purpose, with "performance above expectations" at one end of the scale and "does not meet expectations" at the other. In any case, it is advisable to prioritize activities according to their relative importance.

The accountability required in the objective method should be a welcome relief to those who are concerned about the inadequacies of traits scales, the vagaries of subordinate ratings, or the general lack of concern for measuring results factually as in many evaluation instruments. Presidents, particularly, should welcome this approach. Trustees are frequently impressed when they observe the evidence of all that their executive officer has accomplished in a given period.

The method explained certainly requires much more time and effort than the simple check-off opiniomaire approach. For that reason, it will not be favorably received by all presidents and boards. The least receptivity will probably occur among persons afflicted with subanococcygeal plumbism, that is, a disease debilitating to action, sometimes commonly referred to as lead in the buttocks.

[1]Williamson, Denny, "A Primer On Performance Appraisals," Supervisory Management, AMACOM, (Vol. 24, June 1979), pp. 35-7.

[2]Remmers, H. H. and Hobson, R. L., "The Purdue Rating Scale For Administrators and Executives," The Purdue Research Foundation, Purdue University, Lafayette, Indiana, 1950.

Presented at the National Meeting of the Association of Community College Trustees, 1979.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
ERIC® CLEARINGHOUSE FOR
JUNIOR COLLEGES
96 POWELL LIBRARY BUILDING
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90024
EE 86

SEP 26 1980